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**CEPPS/IRI Quarterly Report: January-March 2005
BRAZIL: SUPPORT FOR ACTIVITY TO PROMOTE BROAD PUBLIC
DISCUSSION ON POLITICAL REFORM**

USAID Cooperative Agreement Leader Award: DGC-A-00-01-00004

Project Dates: February 25, 2005 – June 30, 2005

Total Budget: \$80,000 Expenses to date: \$1,042.05

I. SUMMARY

The International Republican Institute (IRI) is organizing a 3-day conference in Brasilia to increase awareness of the law for election reform proposed by the Brazilian congress. In organizing and implementing this conference, IRI will seek broad multi-partisan participation, provide in-depth discussion of the relevant issues by key political party representatives, and establish a means for sustained dialogue after the event.

Through its extensive network of international expert consultants and practitioners, IRI will interject an international perspective and encourage broad public discussion of election reform among representatives from Brazilian media and civil society. Also, IRI is partnering with IFES, who will provide international expertise on campaign finance and open- vs. closed-list systems (both of these issues are part of the proposed reform bill). By providing an external and independent point of view, the conference will provide Brazilian legislators with an opportunity to incorporate and apply ideas, untainted by domestic Brazilian politics. Neither IRI nor IFES endorse any one political viewpoint; both organizations will simply act as interlocutors in offering diverse views and past experiences from political players in other countries.

II. BACKGROUND

The political party system in Brazil has evolved in unexpected ways, with the appearance of dozens of political parties which are ideologically undisciplined, opportunistic, weakly-structured, and centered on one or two well-known leaders. In countries such as

Mexico, citizens vote for a particular party, not knowing specifically who the candidate is. In Brazil, however, the opposite occurs—up to 80% of voters vote for a candidate, not knowing which party the candidate even belongs to. This has been a major contributor to the profusion of “party-switching”¹, a prevalent phenomenon which has been one of the primary drivers behind the calls for the introduction of election reform legislation in Brazil. Obviously, new regulations that would diminish party switching among Brazilian political parties would most benefit those parties that are currently losing their successfully elected candidates to other parties. On the other hand, parties that are gaining these elected officials are more opposed to such legislation, since they perceive no benefit from it, and see party switching as a valid, competitive means to attain political gains.

The Brazilian congress established a special commission called the *Select Committee on Political Reform*, established to draft reforms, submitted to the committee in December 2003 a significant legislative proposal. Disagreements among the parties prevented the reforms from coming to a vote in early 2004 as scheduled, but the issue of political reform remains a top legislative priority for late 2004 and 2005. In order to take effect for the next general elections, scheduled for October 2006, the reforms must be enacted one year beforehand.

According to political scientists and experts, one of the biggest pitfalls of the bill is that it does not directly address the “party-switching” problem. However, a second reform bill proposed by the Select Committee, which is pending analysis from the Constitution and Justice Committee, establishes a minimum one-year period of party affiliation for candidates who will run for office for the first time, and two years if the candidate has changed parties. It is expected that this bill would also diminish the practice of party-switching.

Therefore, it is vital to encourage broad public and press discussion of the issues. Although the topics appear deeply technical to laypersons, the final legislation could have a significant impact on Brazil and its democratic institutions. In other words, citizens have a huge stake in the debate, which has raised suggestions of public consultations regarding some of the propositions.

III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

On February 25, 2005, IRI began implementing this new cooperative agreement in coordination with CEPPS partner IFES. As of the end of this quarter, IRI has incurred cumulative total expenditures of \$1,042.05.

The specific programmatic activities proposed by IRI are divided into three phases: a) conference planning phase; b) conference phase; and c) post-conference phase.

¹ During 18 months of the 52nd Congress (2003 – 2005), there were nearly 200 “party switches” in the Federal Chamber of Deputies (lower house).

a) Conference Planning Phase:

Identification of local partners. IRI has identified a local NGO—Center for Studies of the Americas at the Candido Mendes University (a.k.a. CEAs/UCAM)—as the partner organization for this conference. IRI has also identified a local in-country consultant, Mr. Silverio Zebral Filho, who manages the Inter-American Studies Program at UCAM and has extensive international experience working with the OAS and the Brazilian Development Bank. Other institutions supporting the conference include: the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the Organization of American States (OAS), the Democratic Governance Program at United Nations Program for Development (UNDP), the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies and Brazilian Senate, the Brazilian Legislative University (UNILEGIS), the Latin-American Parliament – Brazilian Group (PARLATINO) and the Brazilian Political Science Association (ABCP). The Brazilian party institutes, as well as Brazilian and international think tanks, will be contacted next quarter and are also expected to play an important role in this conference. A local web developer has been contracted to develop and maintain the conference’s web site, which is currently under construction. IRI will continue to identify other potential conference participants and speakers from the United States, Europe and the Western Hemisphere.

Preliminary assessment trip to Brazil. In March, an IRI staff member traveled to Brazil and met with the identified local partners, political party representatives and U.S. Embassy officials. In coordination with U.S. Embassy officials and Brazilian members of congress, IRI selected the Ulysses Guimaraes Auditorium within the Chamber of Deputies as the site for the Brasilia conference. In coordination with IFES, IRI has tentatively scheduled the conference for May 30–June 1, however, there is a possibility that the dates for the conference may be changed to mid-June.

Logistical preparations for conference. All local air travel arrangements for the conference, as well as local arrangements including ground transportation and meals for the participants, will be conducted next quarter by the local NGO that IRI has contracted. IRI and IFES will handle air travel for participants from outside of Brazil.

b) Conference Phase:

International experts. IRI has acquired initial commitments from a Commissioner of the U.S. Federal Election Commission, a Treasurer/Congresswoman from Mexico’s PAN Party, and other experts, including those being sponsored by IFES. The experts being selected for this conference are from the U.S., Latin America and Europe. The project is expected to fund five experts from outside of Brasilia, others will be invited to attend at their own expense (note: the same applies to international experts).

Conference Agenda. In coordination with the local NGO and IFES, IRI has drafted a complete agenda, subject to minor changes next quarter as final confirmations of participants and panelists are received.

Press coverage. IRI's local partner has extended invitations to major news print media (at least eight newspapers) in Brazil and to recognized academics from Brazil's major universities (at least six so far). A second round will go out in the weeks leading up to the event.

c) Post-conference phase

Web postings. The web site is still under construction (rights to the web page address have already been secured).

IRG Study Tour. Program activities outlined in this proposal are interrelated and synergistic with IRI's IRG Study Tour. This tour will be conducted next quarter (April 17–April 23) and will provide IRI a chance to generate momentum, interest, recommendations, valuable contacts and other synergies with the Brazilian parliamentarians that have been selected to participate in the study tour.

IV. RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Since this project is still in the pre-conference phase, IRI will evaluate the results and accomplishments of the conference in the next quarterly report.

V. EVALUATION

The IRI assessment trip conducted in March was highly successful in acquiring concrete commitments to sponsor, organize and participate in this event. Planning has progressed in line with expectations, and no significant logistical difficulties have been observed. Overall, the Brazilian members of congress and supporting Brazilian and international institutions have expressed gratitude, interest and enthusiasm for this conference. A full evaluation of the event itself will be included in the next and final quarterly report.